

clever!' The works of Mr, Aldous Huxley are an excellent example. Now Proust is, I think, at his best a master of character and description; but not more than Balzac. He is also a poet in prose; but not more than Chateaubriand or Flaubert. What astounds his reader again and again is rather his Mephistophelean and Machiavellian acuteness. It is not, I think, his most valuable quality; but it is his most striking one. He keeps the intelligence strained to the uttermost, as Johnson found with the conversation of Burke. Indeed to read him is in some ways like listening to the conversation of a genius who (unlike most of diem) should remain a genius in conversation. It recalls to me the first intoxication, in undergraduate days, of Cambridge talk—a rapture, alas, departed. Stendhal seems naive in comparison. Proust's reader feels the delight of the short-sighted person on whom spectacles suddenly bestow a world of magic definition and brilliance, where all was haze before. One could clap one's hands with pleasure. I have sometimes wondered if to have to pass an examination on this book would not be a better education, and test of education, than most courses at Universities. No one has ever carried to such an extreme the precept of Delphi, of Socrates, of Montaigne: 'Know thyself.'

And yet did he?

To many the philosophy of Proust seems

the hearth and
central flame of this book, which is itself the
story of his
acquisition of that philosophy, and his
realisation that to
unfold it he must write this book. So does
this subtle
serpent come full circle, tail in mouth. In
itself, one may
doubt if his view of life is really so
important. It does,
however, serve its artistic purpose. It gives
his work a
background, a backbone, a unity. It plays a
more essen-
tial part in him than in most novelists; so
that there might